

# Holiday Gift Drive September-December 2004

## Col. Zadok Magruder High School

5939 Muncaster Mill Road Rockville, Maryland 20855

Organization Name: Student Government Association Contact: Austin Pate (autsin\_pate@fc.mcps.k12.md.us)

Number of Members in Group: 60 Number of Members Participating: 60 + 3000+ Community Members

While actively involved in numerous school activities, including serving as Parliamentarian of the 180,000 students of Montgomery County, Austin Pate's involvement with community service included orchestrating a sixty school county-wide holiday gift drive benefiting The Dwelling Place (a transitional shelter), The Khronke Shelter for Battered Women, and various other worthwhile charities in Montgomery County. The purpose was to provide gifts to those who found themselves in less than fortunate situations during the holiday season. In the end, this drive effectively promoted the importance of community service while exemplifying the power of the individual as well. At the conclusion of the drive, over 3,500 gifts were collected, sorted, wrapped, and distributed to specific age groups and genders (children and adults alike). Additionally, \$1,500 in cash donations were collected for these charities. This drive successfully combined the efforts of over 3000 people from Montgomery County schools in Maryland and their surrounding communities.

The holiday gift drive was formed to insure that those in our community who found themselves in less than fortunate situations through no fault of their own were remembered and cared for during the Holiday Season. The purpose was two fold, not only did those people receive gifts from the outlying community, but those in the community, parents and children alike were reminded of the importance of giving back and of sharing. Direct benefactors of this project include The Dwelling Place as well as The Betty Khronke Center for Battered Women, along with various other Montgomery County charities.

Initially it was a challenge to make the necessary contacts to insure participation for the project. Austin began by contacting various elementary and middle school principals within our school system, and explained the project in detail in order to secure interest and involvement. He then had to scout out and appoint leaders who would be responsible liaisons at each of the schools. Organizing a project which encompasses the nearly one million square miles of Montgomery County was also a unique challenge. This involved overcoming the obstacle of finding advertising with no budget whatsoever in order to reach the hundreds of thousands of people who reside in our expansive communities. Finally, and perhaps the most daunting challenge was to orchestrate the delivery, storage, sorting, and wrapping of over 3,500 gifts which took over fifteen buses to disburse to the appropriate charity organizations. Orchestrating and implementing this project was not unlike running a small corporation. Austin Pate learned and mastered the skills necessary to effectively market the project by creating and securing free advertising in all county newspapers, which successfully reached hundreds of thousands of households throughout Montgomery County. He then staffed the drive with people who were both responsible and responsive. Organizational skills certainly came into play regarding creating and following a timeline, and orchestrating the "personnel" to wrap, sort, store, and deliver over fifteen busloads of gifts. This myriad of skills will undoubtedly serve him once again, he I carefully plots his agenda for completing his education, and set goals for himself throughout his career. By learning to motivate, delegate and depend upon other people to ensure the success of this project, Austin learned a great deal about himself, and by connecting the dots, learned that reaching out to help others is contagious and incredibly rewarding.

While the original project was implemented last year, including over 30 schools, Austin was responsible for expanding this to 60 schools during the second year. This project enlisted the help of over 3,000 Montgomery County students and administrators as well as the general populous of the largest and most heavily inhabited county in Maryland. Austin's role included contacting several charities within my area to advise them of our intentions and gain their support. He then contacted various elementary and middle schools and principals to encourage participation and enthusiasm on a county wide level. Next, he coordinated and corresponded with those leads on a daily basis and monitored the progress, and finally arranged for the delivery, storage, sorting, wrapping and disbursement of over 3,500 gifts to The Dwelling Place (a transitional home),The Betty Khronke Center for Battered Women, along with several other deserving charities in our area.

The project achieved more than just the material gifts for over 3,000 individuals who otherwise would have gone without gifts during the holiday season. More importantly, it reminded the youth of our county that they can make a difference at any age and reemphasized the philosophy that it is truly better to give than to receive. Thousands and thousands of students and their parents all over Montgomery County came together as a community in this drive and helped to insure its success. Less than fortunate individuals and their families were reminded that they were still a vital part of our community despite their situation as well.